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ABSTRACT

This paper explores links between teachers' learning, the politics and practices of education reform, and teacher identity, examining how teachers learn to negotiate the spaces between promises of improvement, effectiveness, and accountability made in heterogeneous discourses of education reform and their experiences with deteriorating material conditions and social relations of schooling. The paper asserts that learning how to work with or against education reform is a complex process of identity making for teachers, where they encounter and utilize contradictory ideas about good teachers and teaching as well as about children, curriculum, pedagogy, and learning. Researchers designed a small study to examine how Ontario teachers were being positioned and how they understood themselves within the milieu of reform. Twelve teachers completed interviews, commenting on contemporary school reform, particularly issues of curriculum, assessment, and reporting (as well as several other topics). In different ways, all respondents expressed strong disagreement with the provincial government and distrust of their initiatives. However, their teaching and assessment methods showed that they could not avoid reform altogether, and reform shaped their work and identities, even when they strongly disagreed with its goals and methods. Several teachers suggested that democratic and open discussion in their schools was very rare. (Contains 88 references.) (SM)

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Teachers' Informal Learning, Identity and Contemporary Education 'Reform'

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores links between teachers' learning, the politics and practices of education reform, and questions of identity. How do teachers learn to negotiate the spaces between promises of improvement, effectiveness and accountability that are made in heterogeneous discourses of education reform, and their experiences of deteriorating material conditions and social relations of schooling? Education reform (and particularly 'official' reforms initiated by governments) can be viewed as powerful interventions in the structures and material conditions of schooling, often driven by 'externally' generated ideologies that both distort and shape the realities of schooling. However, it is also important to attend to how education reform, as discourses and technologies of change, provides new (and some not so new) practices, frameworks, terms and categories for teachers to use as they make sense of the work they do and the decisions they make. Moreover, the dispersion of education reform, particularly in this second sense, is organized through apparently neutral practices of management, measurement, recording and accounting circulating *in* education, as well as through the more explicitly ideological and political debates and legislation *about* education. We argue that learning how to work with or against education reform is a complex process of identity-making for teachers, where they encounter, and make use of, contradictory ideas about good teaching/ers, as well as about children, curriculum, pedagogy and learning. Negotiating between 'old' and 'new' methods, between child and curriculum-centred teaching, and between evaluations focused on process (or experience) and outcomes is hard work that has profound effects on teachers' sense of self, their identities.

Between 1996 and 2000 we worked together on a research project that Kari directed to investigate the changing role of parents in Ontario education reform.[1] Toward the end of that project the two of us designed a small study to pursue in greater detail the ways in which teachers were being positioned and how they understood themselves in the complex milieu of reform. This chapter is one result of that study. One of our central questions is how notions of effectiveness, improvement and accountability shape images of the good teacher/ing in reform discourses, and how these notions are woven into teachers' talk as they 'account for themselves' in interviews (MacLure, 1993).

Twelve teachers were interviewed. Some were participants in the original research. Some were selected because they had worked as teacher representatives on school advisory councils, others because they teach grades 3 or 6, whose students were targeted for yearly provincial testing. The teachers were asked to comment on contemporary school reform, particularly those aspects having to do with curriculum, assessment and reporting. However, because the interviews were open-ended, several teachers took the conversation to topics that we did not elicit. For example, they talked about stress, burnout and health-related problems that they experienced.

Working Knowledge, Informal Learning and Making 'New' Teacher Identities

Notions of informal learning provide ways to describe connections teachers make between the more general discourses and practices of reform and the ways and conditions in which they articulate what they do and their 'sense of self' in relation to them (Avis, 1999; Coldron and Smith, 1999). On the one hand, this kind of learning is situated and

embodied (Church, Fontan, Ng and Shragge, 2000) in the everyday working knowledge of teachers. On the other hand, it is embedded in the more general discourses and conditions of reform. We consider first some of the teacher identities that are assumed, preferred and legitimized in contemporary education reform discourses and practices, and then explore where and how teachers encounter these identities, and how they learn to "take them up" (Walkerdine, 1990) or "work them through" (Farrell, 2000). How are different bodies differently situated in relation to new teacher identities? What kinds of embodied learning might be involved in the take up or refusal of identities, what rewards, risks and costs might be attached to "the labour of identity" (Adkins and Lury, 1999)? At the end of the chapter we speculate about how such learning, risks and costs are gendered and racialized.

We frame our interpretive questions around identity because the workplace is one of the central sites where identities are formed and learned (du Gay, 1996; Miller and Rose, 1995). This might be especially so for teachers, whose work has historically been described as "more than a job," and whose workplace is at the same time thoroughly known and recognizable to anyone who has attended a school, yet mysteriously opaque to anyone who is not an educator (Britzman, 1991). Moreover, a great deal of research on educational change and improvement is preoccupied with teachers' identities, seeking variously to 'develop' individual teachers' inclinations towards, and capacities for, change; to 'empower' teachers to find and express their 'voice' and capacities as 'change agents,' or to engage teachers in research and reflection on their practice (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Sikes, 1992). Such ideas proliferate in pre-service teacher education, and they are also appropriated into some of the rhetoric of official, government-sponsored policies and discourses of reform. In a 1998 paper, for example, the Deputy Minister of Education for Ontario advised teachers to "be the change you wish to see" (Lacey, 1998). At the same time, the Ontario government's interventions in schooling have served to seriously compromise the environment wherein such ideals might be realized, creating conditions where "being the change you wish to see" has become near impossible for many teachers (see Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, 2000). Nevertheless, notions of the efficient, forward-looking and self-reflexive teacher who collaborates with colleagues and seeks ways to involve parents are very much 'at work' in educators' talk and reasoning. This is so even as schools are subjected to budgets cuts, restructuring of governance and standardization of curricula, testing and reporting. How do teachers make sense of this? How do we?

The notion of governmentality (Foucault 1991; Rose and Miller 1992; O'Malley, Weir and Shearing, 1997) is helpful for thinking about the multiple ways in which power is exercised in schools and rationalized in contemporary education reform discourses – whether generated by and circulated among researchers or asserted through official policies and political debates. According to Gordon (1991) governmental forms of power characteristic of neo-liberalism work by (more or less) indirectly shaping general conditions and capacities for conduct, particularly individuals' exercise of freedom, self-reflection and self-improvement. In this account, freedom is not an essential capacity of human subjectivity standing in opposition to power. Rather, freedom is viewed "as an array of competencies that are ascribed to different agents and can only be realized in relation to specific conditions of possibility" (Barnett, 1999, p. 383). Freedom and agency

are simultaneously the "condition of possibility" of power and its "effects" (Foucault, 1990; Rose, 1996b; Hall, 1996).

Hunter and Meredyth (2000), Popkewitz (1998 and 2000) and Popkewtiz and Lindblad (2000) have made use of governmentality to re-think the discursive and spatial organization and effects of contemporary education policy and research. Popkewitz, in particular, has explored relations between reform, research, teachers' "reasoning" and practices of inclusion and exclusion. In this chapter, governmentality enables us to think about 'education reform' as one of several contemporary fields where discourses and practices of 'improvement,' 'effectiveness' and 'accountability' shape general and everyday conditions of teachers' work and teachers' thinking. It opens up questions about how, in addition to its enactment in legislation and its capacity to control teachers, 'reform' also operates through teachers' self-reflexive practices and "labour of identity" (Adkins and Lury, 1999). However their "dispositions" may be shaped, teachers' actions and ideas cannot be fully predicted or controlled. There is always something in excess of, or not quite like, the "rules of reason" that education reform provides (Popkewitz, 1998). Indeed, by exploring the 'spaces' where teachers encounter and 'take up' new identities, we may be able to see where education reforms reach (one of) their limits. At the same time, these encounters may be ones where indirect and governmental forms of power meet up with more direct modes of containment and discipline, and more overtly ideological and political rhetoric.

How do teachers in this study make sense of different and contradictory discursive resources to explain their work, their students and themselves? In order to address this question in detail we rely on research into teacher biography and identity, in particular the work of Deborah Britzman. In analyzing interviews with student teachers who were developing teacher identities, Britzman draws on the antagonistic push and pull of discourses to create new meanings (1991, p. 111). Teachers, Britzman argues, 'take up' identity through both compliance and resistance to a normative, stereotypical notion of 'the teacher'. She suggests that a "normative voice ... defines what a teacher is and does in relation to the kind of authority and power teachers are expected to display" (p. 115). A "resisting voice" on the other hand, "speaks to one's deep convictions, investments and desire" (p. 115). Within the destabilizing terrain of contemporary reform, the teachers we interviewed express a range of feelings as they negotiate 'new' identities, drawing on contradictory discourses of power and freedom, deep convictions, disavowal and alignment. Some of the conceptual implications of Britzman's insights go beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the attention she brings to questions of psychic investment and desire suggests that relations between "rationalities of government" (Foucualt, 1991) and the formation and actions of subjects cannot be adequately explained through theories of power that focus solely on notions of control and resistance. Nor can they presume the transparency of language and the rationality of subjects.

As many researchers and advocates of school improvement would agree, reform programs are most effective when teachers 'freely' adopted them rather than viewing them as external and political impositions (Sikes, 1992; Carter, 1998; Kruse and Seashore Louis, 1999). The recognition that education reform will work to the extent that teachers take them up as their own has generated a wide range of initiatives that seek to make individual teachers responsible for students' achievement and to shape teachers'

dispositions towards ongoing improvement. The Ontario government recently passed controversial legislation requiring teachers to enrol in prescribed courses and to submit to regular, mandatory testing to maintain their certification. In addition to this overtly directive approach, more benign notions such as lifelong learning, the culture of improvement and the learning organization have been added to the more established vocabulary and practices of pre-service and in-service teacher education and professional development. There can be little doubt that many reform efforts in Ontario are aimed at teachers' learning and knowledge, and Canadian teachers do engage in large numbers of learning activities, formal and informal, to maintain or enhance their knowledge and skills (see Bascia, this volume; Smaller et al., 2000).

Our concern is not so much with organized learning activities in which teachers participate as with more embedded and embodied forms of learning. Within a more general discursive environment where change and reform are asserted almost as slogans and where teachers' knowledge and skills are called into question, we are interested in learning that entails negotiating new identities. One interesting feature of (some of) the teacher identities that are generated in contemporary education reform discourses, including research about reform, is their appeal to and emphasis on, individual teachers' freedom, flexibility and accountability. Related to this is their emphasis on individual schools' capacity to develop collaborative relations within and beyond the school to promote students' achievement. Such freedom – particularly from the purported bureaucratic constraints of school boards and collective agreements - is touted as a central feature of the reform effort. However, while teachers in this study told us that the new curriculum promises some freedom to design suitable teaching and learning strategies, they also had complaints. Targets of achievement or 'outcomes' are set externally, they assume very specific notions about what counts as learning, and students' (and teachers') performance is more insistently measured than ever before. Moreover, report cards and tests have been standardized in ways that are highly prescriptive while the work of preparing for these new accountability practices takes up an inordinate amount of teachers' and students' time. Some teachers in this study were frustrated that over the past five years they had to abandon more innovative and activity-oriented approaches in favour of traditional teacher-centred pedagogies in order to 'cover' all the concepts and skills on which students must be evaluated.

The devolution of responsibility and risk to local schools and individual teachers has brought with it other modes of accountability. They purport to open up the schools to different forms of 'involvement' and 'partnership,' and to make the work of teachers and the learning of students more transparent, particularly to parents. In turn, parents are increasingly positioned as consumers of children's education (Deem, Brehony and Heath, 1996; Crozier, 2000; Robertson, 1999; Whitty, Power and Halpin, 1998). In the name of reducing bureaucratic control, the Ontario government has introduced regimes of regulation that are every bit as prescriptive as earlier ones, something the Tories depict as evidence of their commitment to raising standards of quality and excellence. For teachers, the balance between freedom and accountability would seem to be heavily weighed to the latter. They are 'free' to pursue appropriate strategies to ensure that students in the classroom, no matter their circumstance or the resources of the school and community, meet the targets established by centrally determined curricula, tests and reporting tools.

Discourses of Reform: School Improvement as Common Sense

Contemporary education reform policies are pursued through a range of heterogeneous practices that seek to raise and measure standards, and provide greater accountability to the 'consumers' of education. Promoted by political conservatives and social democrats alike, contemporary reforms in Canada and other English-speaking 'western' countries mandate a panoply of initiatives which seek to put in place modes of governance and management that accord with 'market' principles and practices (Deem, 1990; Ball, 1994; Dehli,1996 and 1998; and Bascia, this volume). During the 1990s Canadian provincial governments appealed to the challenges and threats of the emerging knowledge economy and the potentials and risks of global competitiveness to focus attention on what critics described as falling standards and waste in schools. And while there are ideological differences in how governments identified problems and justified reforms, most urged teachers and students to raise standards, and schools and school boards to reduce bureaucracy, increase efficiency and 'do more with less.' While raising the achievement of students and improving the efficiency and accountability of schools were touted as desirable goals, governments cut budgets, 'restructured' modes of governance, and introduced new modes of reporting and accounting. Alongside the theme of raising standards and 'retooling' schools for global competitiveness, contemporary education reforms in Ontario (and elsewhere) also invoke a pernicious nostalgia for a well-ordered past when women knew their place (in the heterosexual family), when young people were deferential and well-behaved (submitting willingly to teachers' authority at school), and when 'we' knew who we were as a nation (white, European and integral to the British Empire). This mixing of the modern and forward-looking with nostalgic appeals to tradition, generates normative and exclusive visions of the social and the individual, of who belongs and who is excluded from the community and the nation (Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Gillborn, 1999).

In Ontario, the political rhetoric used by the Harris government to justify its interventions in education has made effective use of 'progressive' market discourse, on the one hand, and authoritative assertions of 'traditional' notions of discipline and order, on the other. The government's 'Common Sense' ideology has been especially virulent in the way that teachers and the unions representing them, have been targeted and demonized (Urquhart, 2000). Subjected to a "discourse of derision" (Deem, 1990; Kenway, Bigum and Fitzclarence, 1993), teachers are variously accused of being self-interested, unaccountable and lazy, or lacking the skills and qualifications required in the 'new global economy.' It is as though control of education must be taken away from educators, 'the producers,' and transferred to its 'consumers,' and particularly parents and employers (Deem, 1990). Significantly, teachers are referenced as members of powerful collectives, the teacher unions, or rigid bureaucracies, the school boards. Between 1995 and 2001 the government introduced several bills in parliament to fundamentally reorganize – through simultaneous centralization and decentralization – the education system. At the same time, when teachers are solicited to participate in improvement or reform efforts, the appeal is made to them as individuals who are professional, hard-working and caring. A number of regulatory bodies with an 'arms length' relationship to the government and to teacher unions and school boards have been established to administer and monitor progress on the road to improvement and higher standards.

Teacher unions and education activists have resisted many of this government's initiatives. Indeed, Ontario teacher unions have been among the best organized and most articulate critics of Tory initiatives, culminating in a two-week protest strike in October-November 1997 which closed virtually all publicly funded elementary and secondary schools in the province. But while the unions have had some success in explaining their objections and mobilizing large scale resistance to budget cuts and centralization of power in education – areas where overt forms of power are very much in evidence and lines between 'us' and 'them' can be clearly drawn - the broader agenda of reform and improvement has been a more difficult and diffuse target (Lewington,1998). Even among critics of government-mandated reforms (including several of the teacher federations and the teachers we interviewed) there seems to be some agreement that schools do need to change. The curriculum does require 'modernization' and consistency, and students' achievement must be raised and closely monitored (a search of teacher federation newsletters and websites would support this claim). Thus, calls for greater transparency of teachers' work and accountability of students' learning receive substantial support, not least among the diverse constituency of parents whose interests are frequently invoked to justify education policy initiatives. There is much less consensus among these groups, however, on what a good curriculum would or should include, what kinds of teaching strategies are desirable and effective, or what is meant by transparency and what kinds of practices would provide accountability.[2]

The introduction of a province-wide curriculum, testing and reporting on students' achievement in terms of outcomes has been justified in terms of accountability, both to parents and to 'taxpayers' (a category that predictably appears in government discourse whenever budget cuts and efficiency measures are introduced). The new curriculum, along with standardized tests and report cards, seem to represent a substantial shift in both orientation and practice of teachers, a shift that is justified in order to create a 'culture of improvement.' For students, externally set norms of achievement lift out particular aspects of learning (those that can be measured and accounted for through techniques of testing and reporting) which then come to stand in for everything worth doing and knowing in school. Regimes of reporting and testing, no matter how objective and comprehensive they are designed to be, construe particular kinds of students as normative and good, while many students are positioned as beyond the norm (Burgess and Carter, 1992). The new Ontario curriculum's strong emphasis on display of particular kinds of reasoning and problem-solving strategies naturalizes notions of "the good and reasonable person" associated with the white, heterosexual, middle class.[3] Definitions of what is normal, true and good are asserted in terms that appear to be outside political debate and beyond teachers' capacity for critical reason, as students' performance must be mapped onto pre-designed categories of assessment levels or outcomes. For teachers, these aspects of reform would seem to have profound implications for their view of learning and of children, as well as for their own work and professional identity and autonomy.

While parents are promised greater choice and involvement, and teachers are enticed with greater freedom and responsibility for designing their own teaching strategies, new daily and time-consuming monitoring and reporting practices ensure that learning and teaching are accounted for, and that outcomes are noted and explained. Self-observation and self-reflection are integral to the linked practices of freedom and

monitoring, requiring teachers to engage in daily record keeping of students' activities and achievement, and to interrogate their own performance. These forms of accountability rely on and are successful to the extent that they engage individual workers – or teachers – in practices of self-regulation or self-government (du Gay, 1996; Popkewitz, 1998). A great deal of effort, and much detailed organization, is invested in turning teachers into "change agents" (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Halsall, 1998; Hargreaves, 1994; McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993). That is not to say, however, that all teachers are willing or able accomplices in these processes.

In schools, such regimes of observation and self-regulation can have profound effects, both on the learning and assessment of children and on the work and identities of teachers (Slee, Weiner and Tomlinson,1998). The push for greater accountability, focused on outcomes and more intrusive and regular auditing, testing and reporting procedures, reduces teachers' autonomy and professionalism (Hextall and Mahony, 1998; Sikes, 1992). Further, such techniques privilege certain kinds and terms of knowledge and learning and recognize certain groups of students as competent. Many forms of teaching and learning are thereby rendered invisible or irrelevant, while many students are marginalized or excluded from participation in 'normal' activities and spaces of learning (Carter and Burgess, 1993; Slee, Weiner and Tomlinson, 1998; Walkerdine, 1990). Such notions inform teachers' reasoning, for example, when they describe the limits of their capacity and responsibility, limits which have become more sharply drawn as schools have lost many of the resources dedicated to support 'marginal' students. At the same time, the new curriculum's testing and reporting procedures have entailed increased pressure on teachers' time, leaving little time to work with students whose experience and learning differ from the norm (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, 2000).

Learning Reform, Becoming Change Agents?

When we first started discussing teachers' interview transcripts we were uncertain about what might 'count' as informal learning in their talk. It seemed obvious, at one level, that as schools are changing, the people who work in them, including teachers, would learn to do their work in new ways and would be introduced to new ways of knowing and explaining teaching and learning to themselves and to others. At another level, it seemed that what and how teachers were learning involved something more than acquisition of skills and knowledge. It also involved changing their thinking about, and dispositions towards, teaching. Such fundamental re-learning is referenced in research and policy in terms of the need to promote teacher development and to encourage a 'cultural change' in schools. A discussion document issued by Ontario's Education Improvement Commission in 1997, entitled *The Road Ahead*, typifies such a vision of teachers and schools:

> In our classrooms there will be greater flexibility and interaction among colleagues. Staff will work increasingly as teams. The isolated teacher will become much less common, replaced by a staff team approach that provides for flexibility of grouping and timing based on the needs of students and the nature of the subject being learned. The focus at the school level will move from what is to be covered to how our higher

> standards of achievement can be achieved (Education Improvement Commission, 1997: part 2).

This official text – and its title - conjures up a forward-looking teacher, engaged in progressive improvement efforts. This is a teacher who shares important features with those of the 'entrepreneurial' subject of the market. It does not immediately follow, however, that teachers recognize themselves in these terms or that they want to become this teacher. In other words, the presence of a discourse, and the subject positions it provides, neither guarantees its effectiveness nor its 'take-up' (Walkerdine, 1990). Indeed, a great deal of effort is required to induce teachers to alter their commitments towards the work they do and their identification with teaching. Moreover, there is dispute among researchers, policy-makers, administrators and teachers about the best means and conditions to facilitate such a shift, thus opening up the very identity of teachers to scrutiny, regulation and struggle (see Hargreaves, 1994; Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Gitlin and Margonis, 1995).

The teachers who talked with us have experienced extensive revisions of governing structures, curriculum and assessment practices, and increased pressures to improve the achievement of pupils. Each year since the mid-1990s there have been deep cuts to education budgets and attacks on teachers' collective agreements. And, while teacher unions and school boards have been subjected to a great deal of criticism, teachers as individuals are repeatedly told that they are professionals, and invoked as the key agents, along with parents, of education reform. Thus, a number of quite contradictory discourses and conditions surround teachers at this time.

Alongside images of the dynamic, forward-looking and flexible professional 'on the road ahead,' another image of the teacher emerged in government-initiated school reforms and circulated in much of the media coverage of education in the 1990s. This teacher is stuck in the past, has become complacent, and is incapable of adopting new knowledge and refuses to get on with the business of change. What did teachers make of these conflicting images, and how did they see themselves in relation to them?

The teachers in our study had much to say about the politics of school reform. They had strong views about how schools and teachers have been represented in media and government discourses. Their feelings of having been unjustly attacked; their anger and sense of distrust were palpable. One teacher expressed his frustration in these terms:

> But that's not fair so…all these things…and then all of a sudden you get attacked by everybody. You're not doing a good job. And all these things are telling you are not doing a good job.… And to me it's sad, because teaching is a great thing (Teacher interview #3, August,1999).

Another teacher angrily dismissed attacks on teachers as lies:

> [The government is] lying, they're casting aspersions on teachers, it's slanderous, it's libelous and it makes me angry. I feel powerless to do anything about it. It makes me often wish I were doing anything other than teaching (Teacher interview #6, July 1999).

One government initiative to which teachers kept returning was Bill 160, a massive piece of legislation introduced in September 1997. It had the effect of centralizing control of curriculum and financial decisions in the Ministry of Education. In

opposition to this Bill, Ontario's teacher unions joined together to organize an unprecedented walkout by all of the province's teachers (except those in private schools) in the fall of that year. Lasting for two weeks, the scale of and support for this action was massive, both among teachers and among parents (see Orbit, 1998). Yet the way the teacher unions' leadership ended the walkout and the lack of any apparent impact on the government's education agenda, left teachers in this study feeling angry, cynical or demoralized.

Teachers talked of this event with mixed feelings. They were proud to be part of an important political event. They were nostalgic for a sense of identification with teachers as a large and powerful group, a feeling that they had subsequently lost. There was also regret and disappointment not least because the outcome of this protest was unsuccessful – Bill 160 was passed into law. One teacher said that,

> I would say that the biggest change has been a sense of demoralization among teachers in general. .... Bill 160 had thrown everything into a sense of not knowing – where we're at, where we can go, what it is possible to hope for (Teacher interview #6, July, 1999).

On top of the sense of disillusion that not even such a massive mobilization could influence the government, this teacher's comment alludes to another theme in the interviews. One effect of the current wave of reform is uncertainty and fear, where teachers do not know who to trust, what is expected nor what will happen next. It is as though teachers are the main victims of reform. Teachers expressed this in different ways often with reference to deteriorating conditions and sinking morale among their colleagues.

> The morale too, in general, the school environment...it's below zero. Teachers are not that happy. The program is not that good. There are not enough books. We don't have science books. They said they were gonna give us money for equipment ... I look at the report card...pathetic. They want me to teach music, drama, I mean come on. Too much is too much.... I can't teach music ... I don't know anything about music. O.K. I can talk to another teacher who knows about music, I teach their kids computer, they teach mine music, that's fine (Teacher interview #3, August, 1999).

The 1997 protest represented a strong show of collective organization and union power. Yet, several teachers talked about the unions in conflicting ways. While they identified strongly with teachers as a group and supported the protest, they positioned the union at a distance and 'out of touch' with the frustrations and stress of teachers' daily work. And beyond the identification with strong collective power derived through the protest, the preferred self-image in several teachers' talk was as members of a profession who deserved respect and trust because of their knowledge and status. In seemed in some ways as if 'official' efforts to address teachers as individuals and to isolate them from the unions have been effective. However, if we recall our earlier discussion of how discourses provide a range of often contradictory identities and of how people's engagement with or 'take up' of identities are complex and ambivalent, we would suggest that teachers make sense of themselves, their belonging and identification, in ways that do not neatly cohere around clear notions of 'professional' or 'union' categories.

To demonstrate the unfairness of attacks on teachers, some teachers used discourses of professionalism to assert another more positive image of themselves. They compared their treatment to that of other professionals: doctors were preferred as a group that would not be subjected to such criticism and scrutiny. Teachers felt insulted by government and media descriptions but they also talked about how the climate of distrust surrounding schools and teachers had created conditions where parents were more outspoken and demanding.

> And I find it insulting and offensive for somebody to take that attitude. And I know that they would never go into their doctor's office and say "well I think you should do this when you see your patients". They would never do that. That would be rude and offensive, but they do that to teachers (Teacher interview #5, July, 1999).

Contrasting teaching as a profession and teaching as unionized work has a long and contentious history. The claim of professionalism has operated to regulate teachers at least as much as it has protected them from 'intrusion' into their domain and expertise by various 'outsiders' (Ginsburg, 1996; Robertson and Smaller, 1996). Moreover, discourses of professionalism also operated to separate teachers from the communities in which they taught, identifying 'the teacher' in middle-class and white terms of reason and respectability. To the extent that such notions continue to shape teachers' sense of self, it is not surprising that parents' suggestions about what and how to teach would be viewed as an insult. Furthermore, in today's climate of change and reform the claim to professionalism is played out between the recently established College of Teachers and the teacher unions, at one level, but also in the daily choices that teachers must make and in the terms they use to make sense of their situation. At a time when governments, regulatory bodies and researchers appeal to individual teachers' professionalism to win their consent for initiatives and programs, those very same agencies are imposing ever more detailed control of teachers' work, while reducing the resources available to them. As one teacher said, 'I'm quite displeased with education and it's because now it's, 'this is the program, this is what we have to do, sit down and we must get through it'' (Teacher interview #5, July, 1999).

A second strategy the teachers used to claim a professional identity was to compare the view of teachers today with an earlier and more respectful position they (presumably) enjoyed in the past. One teacher with twenty years' experience said:

> When I started teaching, I was amazed that they paid me to do what I was doing. I want to keep that. I don't have as many days as that anymore, but I still have them, and I would very much like to finish this teaching career and say, they paid me to do this. … And this is my work and I love it, but there's a life beyond this (Teacher interview #9, April 2000).

Other teachers expressed a sense of having to negotiate conflicting and increasing expectations that they themselves, or earlier generations of teachers, were not subjected to in the past. One teacher, who is relatively new to teaching, explained her feeling of vulnerability when people "bombarded" her with questions when they "discovered" that she was a teacher.

> And yet I'm very proud of what I do. But all of a sudden, people out there are … attacking the profession, and I no longer felt … you know, as proud about what I was doing. And I felt like I had to defend everything. And that … I think the … a lot of people out there really don't know what we do in the classroom. And I think for the first time, I started to realize that (Teacher interview #8, August 1999).

Another teacher who teaches in a school in the central part of the city went on at some length about the tensions between deteriorating conditions in the school and the "sudden" changes in the perception and expectations of teachers.

> Because all of a sudden, the government is saying we don't have money for anything…This job is becoming very stressful because everybody is so demanding. The principal comes to you and they want special things or projects to please their bosses and to please the parents. And the parents, the SAC [School Advisory Council] wants something. And then the teachers want you to do something because they want to put the students first. And they can't do so much because you are called in every direction everyday…here your life and work goes home with you (Teacher interview #3, August 1999).

Here we see one of the themes of Total Quality Management – putting the 'consumer' first – although perhaps not in a way that this discourse might have envisioned. Rather than providing a clear map for achieving quality, a great deal of confusion and stress result as this teacher (and other teachers in the study) attempt to sort out conflicting expectations and new lines of accountability.

These interviews explicitly sought out teachers' reactions to what we might call the politics of reform 'out there.' Some seemed to relish the opportunity to vent their frustrations on this topic with us. At the same time, some suggested that teachers had few opportunities and little time or inclination to discuss school reform with their colleagues. Their focus was on their work in the classroom:

> … we're so involved, too, with the teaching and the kids, there isn't really a lot of time to sit and talk about this, sometimes morning recess or before school, and then we really have to teach. You have to program and you have all the work that's involved. Now we're involved in a physical move. I would say that we tend to deal with the job, and think about these things just periodically. It's not on our mind all the time, no. Especially when things are running more or less smoothly (Teacher interview #11, June 2000).

The teacher quoted above was interviewed at the end of the study, three years after the protests against Bill 160, when many concrete effects of reform had been worked into the curriculum and organization of schools. While this interview might suggest that teachers' critique of government-imposed reforms is becoming more muted, the transcript segment is also organized around a familiar set of oppositions between 'the kids' and 'politics,' between 'teaching' and 'sitting around' talking about 'these things.' Not surprisingly, several teachers described their daily work in terms of 'getting on with it.' To do this, it was necessary to avoid complaining and to isolate oneself from others who complain,

including teacher unions and many colleagues. One teacher, who was disillusioned with both "the government" and "the federation," referred in negative terms to the staff room as a site of "complaints."

> I'm not going to complain. I avoid going into the staff room because the talk is usually negative there ... I think a lot of teachers go in and just let their steam off and then they go back to putting on their happy face again...but that's just not my scene (Teacher interview #2, July, 1998).

Isolation from colleagues becomes a strategy for managing daily work. Some aspects of discourses of derision can also be seen here, insofar as teachers' concerns and criticisms are dismissed as "negative" and "not my scene." At the same time, however, there is some recognition that teachers – even this teacher - do have cause for "letting off steam" and that many teachers wear a mask, a "happy face," in the classroom. Teachers work very hard to negotiate a space for themselves in these kinds of contrasting accounts, in different contexts, and with different effects.

Learning to Account for Yourself

The teachers in this study described in vivid detail how they sought to manage and adjust to a new curriculum, testing and report cards, and increased expectations from parents to be involved and informed. As we have said earlier, these descriptions were produced against a backdrop of unfair criticism, demoralization, and diminishing resources. Training or professional development were sporadic and uneven from school to school: principals in the two schools located in middle-class areas were more proactive in this respect. Parent groups in these schools were more successful in raising funds that could be used to provide teachers with 'extras,' such as computers and printers in each classroom for their use. Thus, teachers were provided with different conditions for carrying out routine aspects of their work. While we cannot generalize from these impressions, they do suggest that a structure which 'devolves' many decisions, particularly those concerned with resource allocations, to each school has the potential to increase social and educational inequalities (Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe, 1995).

In these different contexts, teachers actively worked 'old' approaches to teaching into expectations that the new curriculum subjected them to. One aspect of their work, which we asked them to comment on in some detail, was the introduction of a new outcomes-based curriculum and a standardized report card. Some of the teachers agonized over how to balance caring and nurturing ways to be with students and the new curriculum's emphasis on performance and outcomes. While ostensibly providing teachers with freedom and responsibility to devise their own methods for meeting the curriculum's expectations, teachers' descriptions of how they felt they had to change their approach to teaching were remarkably consistent. They had less time for project and group work, very little time to repeat and reinforce lessons, almost no 'social time' with children, and their teaching styles were becoming more teacher - and curriculum - centred.

Some of the teachers were reluctant to abandon the old in favour of the new. Rather, as Carter and Burgess (1993) found in their research with English teachers adopting the National Curriculum in the late 1980s, they sought to integrate different ways of teaching and evaluating. For some, this was a process of trial and error. One

teacher described the process of teaching with the new math curriculum for the first time:

> We were just, well me and another grade 6 teacher, we were just scrambling trying to figure out how to implement this program with no resources and the grade 6 was a totally different way of thinking, it's.. more applied, the skills, into a question... (Teacher interview #5, July, 1999).

Other teachers also described collaborative relationships with colleagues, particularly those teaching the same grade levels, as they pieced together materials and programs. Working backwards from the outlines in the different curriculum 'strands' and the expectations detailed as concepts to be 'mastered' or 'competencies' or 'skills' to perform, teachers incorporated familiar approaches with new, invented or found, materials. In many ways, the new curriculum appeared open and flexible, inviting innovation and adaptation:

> Well I think at least the curriculum ... leaves you open for taking ... The curriculum is not so, is not as structured as the grade 3 testing. So the curriculum, you know, as a teacher, you can pick out different aspects that you want to teach, and you can ... like I would have no problem modifying it so that my kids understand what concept I'm teaching to what they, you know, what their sort of background is or level and trying to relate that into it, into the curriculum as well and doing (those) parallels.
>
> So at least the curriculums is a little bit more flexible. I mean it looks like it's not, but there's a lot you can actually do with it (Teacher interview #7, November 1999).

While the new curriculum provided teachers with some freedom to develop their own pedagogy and program that would enable students in their classes to perform as well as possible, teachers also talked about having fewer choices, less time and insufficient resources. Thus, the same teacher who approved of the flexibility in the new curriculum went on to characterize the report cards as rigid and formulaic:

> But they give you this formula, you know, and you feel as though ... you have to abide by it, or you're not truly reflect ... or the child isn't being truly, the marks don't truly reflect the child, and yet it's hard, because all these faces in front of you are so different (Teacher interview #7, November 1999)..

Some explained that whereas they believed in project and activity-oriented teaching approaches, along with a child-centred pedagogy especially popular amongst teachers of younger children, the new curriculum had forced them to abandon these strategies. Moreover, several lamented that the demanding expectations of new curriculum afforded them little time for repetition or to provide weaker students with extra support. In fact, it seemed that a curriculum that appears to offer teachers more flexibility is generating more commonality in teaching, with more teacher-centred pedagogy and curriculum-driven organization of teachers' and students' time. The same teacher who earlier described how she was able to design her own approach later described her frustration with lack of time, particularly for 'those little things:'

> [F]or the last year, that's been my hardest, that's been my biggest challenge, is finding time for all those little things. And I think that's what's sad. I mean, we're caught up in making sure that we get everything done in this curriculum, we're caught up (in) making sure that I get this grade 3 testing under way. You know, (everybody's) caught up in all these things and you tend, especially to those students who do lack the confidence or lack ... just, you know, a good feeling about themselves ... I've had children in this classroom who, you know, it tears my heart out to see what's going on (Teacher interview #7, November 1999).

Working in urban schools where children's lives and schooling experiences are structured through poverty and racism, teachers encounter many children who do not easily fit the normative student identity around whom the new curriculum and its tests and report cards have been shaped. The most recent wave of reform in Ontario not only ignores these students, but constructs them as outside the norm of expectations, different and marginal even before they enter school (Goldstein, 1998; see also Popkewitz, 2000). At the same time, schools have lost many of the supports designed for students with disabilities or special needs, those whose first language is not English or French, and boards have had to cut budgets for teaching assistants. Indeed, several of these teachers were quite explicit about how the new curriculum, and the time available to get through it, defined clear limits of their capacity to support struggling students. It was also clear that race, ethnicity and class organized teachers' descriptions and explanations of who these students were. Moreover, in the name of distributing resources more 'equally' across the province, urban schools have been stripped of resources to fund precisely those programs that sought to support these students and render their education more equitable. The teachers who talked with us therefore worried a great deal about the cumulative effects of reforms on students who were being further marginalized, and felt that they were less able to assist them now than in the past. However, while teachers lamented the loss of resources, some also mobilized discourses of inadequate families, poor parenting or unsupportive communities to explain that schools and teachers could 'only do so much' to assist a child.

When they described the more social and pastoral aspects of education it was, as the teacher above suggests, as though they were conspiring with students to 'steal' time away from the curriculum to enjoy a good story or reflect on a sad event. These crucial dimensions of teaching and learning relationships simply do not 'count' and cannot be counted in how students' achievement is measured in relation to the new curriculum. At the same time, this 'social' and 'caring' dimension of teachers' work and working identity, historically associated with the figure of the woman teacher, must be subordinated to the image of the efficient and organized teacher who can cover the curriculum and whose students can meet expectations. This new teacher is not a 'social worker,' a point several teachers made when they described the boundaries of teacher identity. The notion that 'too much' is now expected of teachers in the way of 'social' support and learning has circulated quite widely in government reports and media, making it reasonable to identify the 'real' work of teaching – and the core of teachers' identity – in terms of the explicit curriculum and its expectations.

Reporting and Accounting

As we have suggested, not all of the teachers adopted self-descriptions provided in contemporary reform discourses. Even those who tried to do so seemed to have difficulty producing a coherent account of themselves and their work in these terms. The new report cards, whose use became mandatory during the first year of this study, provide an illustration of these ambivalences. The report cards were a source of huge frustration and pressure, and completing them involved a great deal of teachers' time. Indeed, during report card time it was impossible to schedule teacher interviews, as every available minute was spent on this task. For some teachers, particularly those who wanted to maintain what they described as a 'more personal' approach while also doing well within the terms of the new curriculum, filling in the report cards involved a great deal of time and effort:

> I find just writing the report cards is very exhausting. I ... You know, they say you don't have to fill up the box, but I do. Sometimes I need to go to a smaller font just to get across what I want to say and I think ... the feedback I've received from the parents so far, and this is throughout my writing of report cards, has been very positive. They feel that when they pick up the report card, they get a clear perspective of where the child is at and how that child is doing, and I think that truly comes out of the anecdotals, though (Teacher interview #8, August 1999).

While completing the report cards is an exhausting exercise, positive responses from parents provide some reward. At the same time, however, seeking recognition from parents was not always a positive experience. Among the middle class, the anecdotal descriptions that teachers include on the cards are appreciated but they are not sufficient. To this teacher's dismay, some parents also want to know how their children compare with other students in her class:

> And that's what I get, I get ... parents will come to me and say, well given where this, the grades on this report card, how does my child compete with the rest of the students in the class? Is the child doing ... where everyone else is, or are there students in the classroom that are really A+ students, and given that my child isn't doing as well, or ... that's what, they come with that question a lot, I find (Teacher interview #8, August, 1999).

Comparing, differentiating and ranking are integral to systems of many forms of assessment and reporting, particularly those that produce grades. Regardless of how they might view their merit (or otherwise), teachers, students and parents become complicit in such ranking practices, particularly in contexts where the 'performance' of students and of schools are vested with high stakes and publicized results and comparisons. Nevertheless, teachers' views of the curriculum and report cards were not wholly negative. Some teachers invoked the interests of parents, as well as teachers, to suggest that they represented an improvement:

> For me, for report cards, I think they're trying to make it universal, for right across the province, which in a way is good for, as a parent or as a teacher when you move from one school to another (that) it is exactly the

> same, so you're not learning a new report system. And parents can also look at it and understand most of it (Teacher interview #5, July 1999).

But even this teacher, who was quite positive about the report cards and confident about his ability to use them, found their format too prescriptive:

> Only problem with the report card, it becomes very prescriptive, in that we have certain language that is already given us, so it's no longer ... personalized for towards the student. I find them easy to do. It doesn't take me very long to do a set of report cards, as compared to other people (Teacher interview #5, July 1999).

This teacher attributes his competence with report cards to his computer literacy. A further segment from his transcript suggests that the ability to 'cut and paste' with aid of the computer becomes a key skill for teachers, replacing (at least for this teacher) the 'personalized' evaluation and description of each student required in the old report card:

> I'm quite computer-literate so I know how to use it, I know how to cut and paste, and because it's so prescriptive, it's ... if you were an A student, these are the comments that you get. And then you just cut and paste for all A students. And if you were a B student, there are key terms, all the time, most of the time, some of the time, and so that little word just changes for an A, B, C, D student. So, I think depending on the teacher and how they organize themselves for the report card, you could actually do it in a day. It could be that simple. Because you have your grades ... and if it's an A student then that student just gets all these comments. And you just cut and paste.
>
> So for me, I find them much easier than the old ones to do, because before it had to be very personalized and you'd have to go into all the different skills that the child could or couldn't do ... and also look at social behaviours and interactions. Now, it's very specific outcomes, and ... so I could easily do it in a weekend, and not complain. Where other teachers are probably griping about it (Teacher interview #5, July 1999).

While this account may seem rather brazen, it also captures something about the move to a curriculum based on skills and 'outcomes' and to modes of assessment and reporting that rely on computer technology. While our study was quite small, gendered patterns nevertheless emerged in teachers' talk about the report cards. This was partly related to computer skills, where two of the men we interviewed described how they functioned as unofficial computer 'experts' in their schools. For other teachers, having access to and learning to use a computer and the report card software presented a substantial challenge, particularly during the first year. A woman teacher describes her frustrations:

> I: Mm. I want to jump back to report cards. How did you learn how to do report cards? How did you get yourself computer-literate …or?
>
> T: I don't even know if I am really quite yet. I mean, I've got the discs now and I'm going to call my sister up [laughs] and say, OK, I press this button and I do this and, because, you know, we just got a new computer at

> home, but ... I had a horrible experience at this time last year, because I had to work here at school because my computer at home wouldn't take the information because we were ... in the process of getting a new computer. And they would, all of a sudden like, you'd be working on them and it'd be like 5, 6:00 at night, we have to shut down the computers because there's a glitch. Or, something's happened...and so you had.. to go home. And that's so defeating (Teacher interview #7, November 1999).

We do not want to imply that women teachers are not skilled computer users. Some women described themselves as quite computer literate. One woman in particular had been very proactive in seeking out professional development in this area. However, the men teachers made it clear that their proficiency was well recognized in the school, while women seemed less inclined (or perhaps less able) to display their computer skills as an asset to be rewarded. Thus, gender may be at work in how women and men teachers' skills are differentially recognized (see Acker, 1997; Hubbard and Datnow, 2000).

Making a Self by Distancing from the Other

Earlier we suggested that teachers invoked several strategies to compare the stresses of the present with an often nostalgic vision of the past, and to contrast the criticism and control of teachers with the high regard and autonomy presumably enjoyed by other professionals. We turn now to how the teachers made use of strategies of recognition, identification and dis-identification, or alignment and disavowal (Britzman,1991) to construct desirable images of themselves. In linguistic terms, we can see how teachers are actively "working through" (Farrell, 2000) several discourses, in order to shape new identities that can work for them in changing education environment. These identities, however, are neither as entrepreneurial as some accounts of new workplace identities more generally would suggest (du Gay, 1996; Miller and Rose, 1995; Rose, 1996a) nor are they as closely aligned with reform as school 'improvers' and government officials might wish.

Let us consider how one teacher uses contrasting descriptions to locate herself as hard-working, efficient and good. She, too, associates the staff room, the space where she might interact with her colleagues, as a place to avoid, except when she is required to attend the Friday morning staff meeting:

> I spend my recesses here [the classroom] and I spend my lunch hour in my room. I'm here every morning. I don't go to the staff room except Friday morning I go. I go out once a week for lunch, maybe. The rest of the time I'm in this classroom from 8 in the morning till usually 4:15-4:30 (Teacher interview #9, May, 2000).

In this self-description of the teacher at work in the classroom all day, through the lunch hour, she both conveys her commitment to her work and sets up a contrast between herself and her colleagues. Thus, she continues:

> [P]eople cannot whine, you cannot whine if you don't have enough time because you're taking an extra half hour for sleep. I take my time out of sleeping time in order to have time to get everything done so...I think you have to watch and plan. And some people, if you were one of those that

> have to go home and have a nap after school, well then maybe you should stay in at lunch and do your work if you're not going to get it done at night (Teacher interview #9, May, 2000).

The good teacher, then, watches, plans and manages her time, even sacrificing her sleep to get her work done. In contrast, teachers who complain about not being able to get their work done can be rejected – along with the substance of their claims. They are, in her account, the cause of their own problems by being unable, or unwilling, to make efficient use of their time. A bit later in the conversation, she returns to this rather unfavourable description of her colleagues:

> [At] this school – people get here very late. Like they don't arrive too early here, on the most part. There are some of us here before 8 in the morning, Many people come in at 8:30 and we start here at 8:45. I don't know how they organize their lives (Teacher interview #9, May, 2000).

Time – its extent, use, allocation, regulation and management – takes on a significant weight in how she describes herself. She emphasizes her efficient use of time, along with her continuous presence in the classroom, as concrete and practical evidence of her identity as a hard-working professional. The effort that goes into the management of time and organization of space is a visible marker of what Adkins and Lury (1999) call "the labour of identity." At the same time, we are aware that in the context of an interview with university-based education researchers, teachers might be inclined to portray themselves in flattering ways. It may be a situation where an individual would draw attention to her good qualities through an exaggerated contrast between her efficient self and the lacks she identifies in her complaining and not-quite dedicated or energetic colleagues. The interview may be a site where identity is not only laboured, but be-laboured.

Nevertheless, this teacher's strategy of aligning herself with a rigorous work ethic and her description of disavowal of pleasure or leisure is not unique. Indeed, teachers, and particularly women teachers, have been actively encouraged to view themselves in this way, with representations of the woman teacher as self-sacrificing and dedicated, shaping discourses of education since the inception of formal schooling (see Prentice and Theobald, 1991; Steedman, 1985; Britzman,1991; and Dehli, 1994).

This teacher also provides some insight into the extraordinary effort that goes into producing or 'performing' the identity of the professional woman teacher. Here she is not wholly unsympathetic to the plight of those whose labour goes un-rewarded or who, in her words, have been "forced to swallow" a "very bitter pill."

> I've seen many people who have not been able to maintain that perspective, and this has become a very bitter pill that they've been forced to swallow... And I don't want that, because I think you infect everyone that you deal with. It affects the children and it can infect them. And I don't want that (Teacher interview #9, April 2000).

Medical metaphors were used by teachers in other contexts as well. One teacher considered the staff-room a place of risk from contagion, where a complaining or negative attitude might "rub off" on him. Other teachers, in different schools, indicated that they also avoided the staff room for similar reasons. Such statements may seem to

lack empathy, but they may also suggest some insight into colleagues who suffer physical illness and psychological strain. Perhaps there is fear that they, too, might succumb to the pressures unless they maintain their focus and efficiency, avoiding contact with those so afflicted. References to the school and the staff-room as spaces of danger and to colleagues as 'contagious' may also speak to anxieties and disavowal of those who are seen as different and deficient in reform discourses. Such statements also make visible a view of the self that demands independence, self-sufficiency and individual freedom and responsibility. In one sense, the 'choice' to isolate oneself from the social and collegial contexts of the school echoes with the rhetoric of neo-liberalism and its elaboration of the autonomous, risk-taking and flexible entrepreneurial subject (du Gay, 1996). In another sense, however, it works against notions of collegiality and teamwork that are also central to education reform. Moreover, the notion that a teacher has the capacity to 'rise above' her colleagues, unencumbered by a body that might feel stress or failure and disassociated from the social conditions of her workplace, suggests an investment in an impossible fiction (Walkerdine, 1990).

These interviews provide a glimpse into the possibly substantial health effects involved in 'making yourself up' as the autonomous and change-oriented teacher privileged in current education reforms. Indeed, the depth of insecurity, anxiety and stress that are generated for some teachers surprised us.[4] And while schools and teachers as a group may appear to outsiders as collegial and mutually supportive, the teachers who talked with us about struggling with their work feel that they have individually 'failed.' For some, it was as though their adjustment – or inability to adjust – to new conditions was literally learned through the body as stress, ill health and failure.

For one teacher, the reforms seemed to generate a diffuse sense of anxiety and insecurity about his ability to perform. In the interview he returned several times, in different ways, to his insecurity about whether and how he could become – and be viewed as – a 'good' or 'good enough' teacher.

> [The reforms] are a bit cumbersome …I'm going to have to see how good I am at it. To tell you the truth, I feel as though there are more demands now on me to teach better and still evaluate all those strands. I think I'll have to be more skilled so I'll have to see whether I'm good at it or not (Teacher interview #2, July, 1998).

This teacher told us that he was actively looking for a way out of teaching. Another teacher attributed negative effects on her health to increased stress in the job:

> I've been sick … and I'm a healthy person. I play hockey, I play football, I walk the dog every day. I don't drink coffee, all those things, I don't smoke. I should be a healthy person. But I'm not. … I'm always tired … (Teacher interview #7, November, 1999).

A third teacher also complained about the growing pressures of work and worried about the effects on her health:

> …I thought, I'm going to take [the summer] off […] and yet when the summer hit, the first two weeks my body just crashed. And … so I realized that from September to June I put my life on hold. Because you know, it's work, work, work, this has to get done. […] My social calendar revolves

> around what I need to do in terms of schoolwork (Teacher interview # 8, August, 1999).

While she did dwell on her health and her doubts about her capacity to 'cope,' thus framing what she was feeling as her individual problem, this teacher (along with others) also felt that she would have benefited from workshops, thus indicating that her predicament might be shared with other teachers. Several teachers complained about the availability and quality of workshops related to the new report:

> I find that we have had very little training at this point. Now whether there will be training in the future, I don't know. [...] [S]o I find just the writing of the report cards is exhausting (Teacher interview # 8, August, 1999).

In relation to the new curriculum, another teacher also commented on the lack of training and resources:

> The curriculum ... there were just so many different topics that we just couldn't even address in the one year. I'm sure you heard about the math program. [laughs] Some of the math program alone caused enough irate parents and myself, because there was just no training, it was just given to us and said, do it, and then we received one day and six hours, now you're fully into it, and then, I think six months later there was a workshop after school, to learn more about it, so ... (Teacher interview #5, July 1999).

Conclusions

The changes brought about through education reform accord in many ways with forward-looking and modern 'devolved' and neo-liberal forms of governance, in so far as they target the general conduct of individuals, seeking to create conditions where people are provided with a range of opportunities to practice 'freedom,' become 'agents of change' and make choices. At the same time, the devolution of choice and freedom also entails having to take responsibility for the choices that are made and the risks that are taken (du Gay, 1996; Robertson, 1999; Rose, 1996a). Our reading of transcripts of teacher interviews suggest that reform and restructuring of schools have introduced new modes of regulation of teachers and their work. In particular, the new curriculum and the ways in which students' learning must be accounted for, have brought about an important set of shifts in teachers' daily work. Yet, reform remains elusive and teachers engage in many forms of subversion and resistance.

The effectiveness of reform cannot simply be explained with reference to increased external control or loss of autonomy, although introduction of centralized legislative power, budget cuts and restructuring of governance are, of course, tremendously important and keenly felt by teachers. Similarly, the range of teachers' responses to reform cannot be fully appreciated through frameworks that focus on compliance or resistance, or that take teachers' political or professional mobilizations through their unions as evidence of their positions. We do not pretend that our study provides a complete picture, and doubt if such a vision is either possible or desirable. However, by attending to 'governmental' forms of power and by interpreting teachers' interviews, we suggest that contemporary reform requires that teachers themselves become engaged as 'agents of change,' but that they do so in complicated and unpredictable ways.

In different ways, all of these teachers expressed strong disagreement with the provincial government and distrust of their initiatives. Nevertheless, as they described their work, their teaching methods and their assessment practices, it became clear that teachers couldn't avoid reform altogether and that it shapes their work and their identities, even when they strongly disagree with its goals and methods. Moreover, several teachers described social relations in schools in ways that suggest that democratic and open discussion is very rare (Sarason, 1996), they are contrived (Hargreaves, 1991), or they are dismissed as a futile exercise in complaint. At the same time, some teachers are clearly struggling, individually and in isolation, to 'cope' with an increased workload, an ever more tightly regulated schedule, and with contradictory approaches to curriculum and teaching. While it is important to attend to 'public' or official politics of reform, many of the apparently non-political features of the curriculum, testing and reporting procedures could have an equally important impact on schools and children, and these features, we argue, also involve new ways for teachers to account for, and identify, themselves.

In many ways, the skills based curriculum and the increased emphasis on testing and reporting, all administered at a distance from the provincial government by a non-elected agency of experts, provides an ideal example of neo-liberal government. Teachers make choices and take responsibility for them in their everyday work; in this sense reform is a mode of government that works through the regulation of teachers as 'free' subjects, a freedom which these teachers both cherished and lamented. This is how it is worked out in schools. While this new environment made options available for teachers, it also entailed individual risk and responsibility for failure.

In these contexts, then, teachers must work through competing discourses and expectations, a process that also involves (among other dimensions) attempts to negotiate, live or 'perform' particular, and in some ways conflicting, identities. Moreover, this emphasis on the individual teacher whose performance has become more transparent and closely monitored appears to have led some teachers to isolate themselves from their colleagues, the teachers' unions and from some of the students they teach, particular those whose performance does not meet 'normal' expectations. While some of the teachers we interviewed relished their new freedoms, they were also frustrated by the lack of resources to realize them and with the ways they were made individually responsible for students' or their own 'failures.' In some ways, the pressures between growing expectations and limited resources, along with the emphasis on individual responsibility and risk, might contribute to some teachers needing to demonstrate their efficiency and success by distancing themselves from their colleagues, while relinquishing responsibility for precisely those students who need them most. These are two areas where markers of difference such as race, class, age and gender, of teachers and students, may come into play in powerful ways (Popkewitz, 1998; Schick, 2000). Based on this small study (as well as the larger project of which it is a part) we would speculate that the extent and ways in which teachers are able to gain recognition as 'change agents' are intertwined with how schools produce and reproduce social relations of power and teachers' different positionings in these relations. We would imagine that how teachers are positioned in gender and racial orders, for example, has consequences for how their efforts to shape new identities are interpreted, whether they are rewarded, ignored, pitied or viewed with suspicion and fear. Furthermore, it also seems that the location of schools,

and teachers' common sense knowledge of schools' populations, have considerable impact on what kinds of reforms, and the expectations they entail, teachers consider appropriate or relevant. While this study considered teachers in relative isolation from such contexts and concerns, future research would need to explore the effects of education reform on teachers' identities, on students and on the social landscapes within and beyond schools.

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[1] In addition to Doreen, the five students were, Anne Bradbury, Grace Puja, Leeno Karamanchery and Karyn Sandlos. This research involved observation of meetings of school advisory bodies, fundraising and social events, curriculum nights, and so on, in four urban elementary schools. It also involved about 50 interviews with parents and community members, principals, and teachers who are taking part in various school advisory functions in these schools. The schools are located in two different school boards in different areas of the city. A second component of that project entailed collection and reading of policy documents and media accounts, as well as following political and scholarly debates about contemporary education 'reform' in Canada and other English-speaking, western countries.

[2] Again, see newsletters and websites of teacher organizatons, as well as groups such as People for Education, Metro Parents Network and the Ontario Parents Council.

[3] For the US, see Popkewitz, 1998; for England, see Slee, Weiner and Tomlinson, 1998; Epstein and Johnson, 1998.

[4] See Blackmore, 2000 and Acker, 1997 and 1999, for feminist research that confirm such impressions

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